



Representative **Ruth Kagi**

2008

Legislative Wrap up

Dear Neighbors:

This year's legislative session sped by, but we accomplished a great deal in just 60 days.

I'm writing to share a few session highlights and to let you know I'm back at my district office in the Shoreline Center.

It was a frugal session. Even though we enjoy one of the healthiest state economies in the nation, a cloudy national economy made it prudent to build strong budget reserves. That's why our \$306 million supplemental budget is less than one percent of our overall budget—and why it saves fully \$830 million for future needs.

Fortunately, we made our limited spending go a long way towards goals we care about in the 32nd District – especially improving education and children's services, preserving our environment, and protecting health and safety. You'll see highlights inside.

It is impossible to cover an entire legislative session in 4 short pages; so please let me know if you're interested in an issue not covered here. I'll be happy to provide you with more information.

As ever, please remember my legislative priorities and many of my best ideas for laws are shaped by what I hear from local citizens. I'm honored to serve you and would love to hear from you. Let's keep in touch!

Sincerely,

Rep. Ruth Kagi



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Committees:

Early Learning and Children's Services (Chair)
Appropriations
Appropriations Subcommittee on Education

Important meeting on Community Cooperation

I'd like to invite Shoreline residents and employers to join me and King County Councilmember Bob Ferguson for an all-community discussion about "Building Community Cooperation." The event, which is sponsored by Forward Shoreline, begins at 7:00 p.m. on April 16, 2008 in Schirmer Auditorium, on the campus of CRISTA Ministries. It is free and open to the public. A major community enhancement announcement will be made at the conclusion of the meeting. For more information: Please visit www.ForwardShoreline.us.

Rep. Ruth Kagi

Education: Our top priority

The long-awaited task force report on reforming state funding for schools is due in December. However, we couldn't wait until December to make some key improvements.

Despite a very modest overall supplemental budget, the Legislature added \$101 million to education funding and made several important policy changes. A few highlights:

We improved the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). Elementary and middle school tests, except writing, will be shorter and the high school math test will be replaced with more appropriate and focused end-of-course assessments.

We increased teacher salaries and funding for school supplies. We fully funded the public's teacher salary initiative (I-732) and added a ½ percent "catch up" cost of living adjustment to help teachers. Plus, we gave schools an additional \$6.5 million (about \$6.50 per student) for school supplies, computers and related costs.

Better educating for careers is the goal of new policies and incentives to help school districts align career and technical education with high-demand job opportunities and college programs. Plus, a new \$100 million School Construction and Skill Centers account will help school districts build needed facilities.



Evergreen Cities: We did it!

The Evergreen Cities proposal is now the law! I'm proud my work with Audubon Washington and other leading environmental organizations was supported by so many citizens and leaders, including Shoreline Council member Janet Way, who testified on my bill.

The new law will help communities across Washington protect and plant trees that are essential to our future air quality, water quality and quality of life. Urban and suburban trees reduce air pollution and combat climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide. They also enhance real estate values and Washington's natural beauty while reducing water runoff that is devastating Puget Sound. Passing the Evergreen Cities law was one of the top four 2008 priorities of leading environmental organizations.

In fact, we scored a clean sweep by also passing the other three top priorities of the Washington Environmental Coalition: (1) the Climate Action & Green Jobs reform, which limits climate pollution and maps out a path to a "green jobs" economy; (2) Local Solutions to Global Warming, which will help local governments make smart land use decisions that promote green, clean and more energy-efficient communities; and (3) the Local Farms – Healthy Kids initiative, that will enable schools to provide more locally-grown fresh fruits and vegetables to kids. This innovative "win-win" idea will improve children's health and give a needed boost to family farms.

Working for the nation's children

I'm honored to announce I've been selected as one of only 10 public officials from across the nation to serve on the core advisory group for the national Partnership for Early Childhood Science and Policy.

This partnership between the Center for the Developing Child at Harvard University, the National Governors Association, and National Conference of State Legislatures is devoted to guiding successful, science-based birth-to-five policies that improve the life chances of vulnerable children and their families.

This exciting opportunity fits perfectly with my role as Chair of the Early Learning and Children's Services Committee. It also shows that national leaders are paying attention to Washington state's progress in early childhood education and other vital services that help young kids and their moms and dads.



Rep. Kagi With Jack Shronkoff and Mary Jo Bane, Dean of the Kennedy School at Harvard University. Shronkoff heads the Center for the Developing Child at Harvard.



Helping seniors get great long-term care



Did you know the percentage of our state population that is over age 65 will double in the next 20 years? We passed important long-term care reforms to delay the need for expensive care while promoting high-quality home and community-based care.

A new law will launch a statewide falls prevention program with affordable senior-focused exercise programs, education and risk-assessments to help reduce falls and nursing home placements. The number of seniors hospitalized for falls exceeds the total number of people who are hospitalized due to motor vehicle crashes. We can reduce these injuries!

We greatly expanded support—including respite care—for family and other unpaid caregivers who provide long-term care. Unpaid caregivers are the unsung heroes of long-term care. These improvements were a top priority for AARP Washington and the Senior Citizens Lobby.

We passed a model long-term care insurance law that offers important new consumer protections, including requirements that insurers fully disclose costs and consumer rights and give full refunds if a policy is cancelled for any reason within 30 days of purchase.

Everyone gains when seniors and people with disabilities have long-term care options that let them “age in place” at home or nearby settings. They enjoy a higher quality of life, and they and their families—and taxpayers—avoid expensive nursing home care.

Progress in early learning and helping children

As Chair of the Early Learning and Children’s Services Committee, I am very pleased by how much progress we made in 60 days on child care, early learning opportunities, and services to care for vulnerable children.

To improve child care, the Department of Early Learning will hire quality improvement specialists to better ensure consistency and quality in child care licensing.

To dramatically improve early learning opportunities, we launched a plan to upgrade existing Early Childhood Education and Assistance Programs into a state Head Start program. Head Start is successful at helping young disadvantaged kids. Every dollar invested in the program returns \$9 in later savings through reduced needs for remedial education, corrections and other costs or lost opportunities.

We also improved care for vulnerable children. Children at risk of abuse or neglect will be safer because we called for better safety assessments and more frequent visits to their homes. To help foster children, we are starting a new pilot program to explore new support models for serving foster youth with exceptional behavioral or medical needs. We also funded twice-monthly visits with siblings, to reduce the tragic sense of isolation that foster children often experience.

This year’s gains for education and children’s services clearly made children the biggest winners of the session.

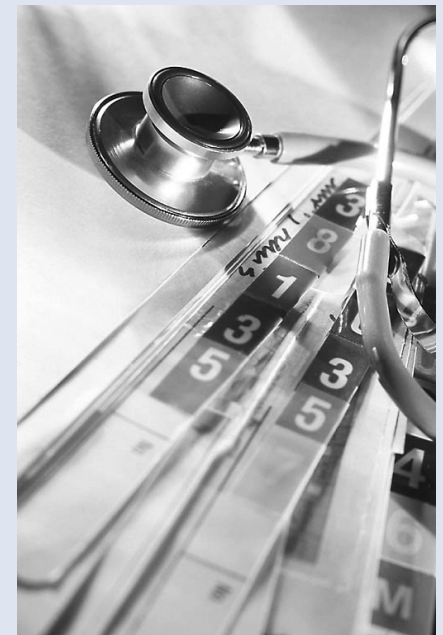


Working for affordable health insurance

Skyrocketing health insurance costs are causing terrible hardships, especially to people who buy their own insurance, because their employers don’t provide coverage. Premium hikes in this “individual market” are averaging 20 percent a year and often exceed mortgage payments! Meanwhile insurers are amassing record profits and surpluses.

To restore balance in insurance pricing, we gave the state Insurance Commissioner the power to demand justification for proposed premium increases and to reject premium hikes that are unreasonable. Most other states have similar protections. Washington’s families deserve this protection, too.

We also fine-tuned plans for a “Health Insurance Partnership” that will help small businesses provide affordable health coverage to lower-income employees beginning next year. This public-private partnership will help businesses, workers and taxpayers cope with rising insurance costs.





State transportation help for local needs

When people in Lake Forest Park asked for state help to build a raised sidewalk at SR 522 and NE 155th St., I was glad to assist: nearby children and elderly residents were walking or using wheelchairs at street level within 3 feet of traffic moving at 45 MPH! The transportation budget funds this important safety project.



Lake Forest Park will get help to build a raised sidewalk.

Local residents are also rightly concerned about how future tolls on the 520 Bridge might impact our local roads. The Legislature directed planners to evaluate potential impacts on Lake Forest Park and Kenmore, and to develop strategies to reduce them.

Local projects win in facilities budget

To conserve tax dollars, Lawmakers passed a very lean facilities budget this year. But state leaders agreed it is essential to invest in the future of the Fircrest campus in Shoreline and Saint Edwards Seminary in Kenmore.

\$270,000 is in the capital budget to complete the "hybrid option" master plan for the Fircrest Campus. Local citizens like how this plan combines a good mix of uses, including government offices, public services, open space, and mixed-income housing.

I'm pleased that we also got \$2.3 million to save the Saint Edward State Park Seminary Building, which is being threatened by water flowing in through windows, gutters and the bottom floors. The seminary building and park are vital to the character of Kenmore and the region. We have a duty to preserve them for future generations.



The Fircrest Campus is an important part of Shoreline.

Washington Families Fund

As the original 2005 sponsor of the Washington Families Fund, I'm thrilled we expanded the program to help 4,500 more families escape homelessness over the next 10 years. This wonderful public-private partnership works with organizations like the Gates Foundation that provide matching dollars for service-enriched housing for homeless families with children. This partnership has become one of our most successful programs to rescue children and families from homelessness.



**Important
meeting on
Community
Cooperation**
CRISTA Ministries campus
Schirmer Auditorium
April 16, 2008
7:00 p.m.

Printed on recycled paper

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